



**BUREAU OF
RECLAMATION**

MINIDOKA NORTH SIDE

N E W S B R I E F

Newsbrief #5

April 2004

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN

Reclamation to Release Draft Environmental Assessment

This is the fifth Newsbrief prepared as part of the Minidoka North Side Resource Management Plan (RMP) planning effort. This issue announces the availability of the Minidoka North Side RMP Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) document, scheduled for printing and distribution in April 2004. As explained in this Newsbrief, the Draft EA is being released for a 45-day public review period. To facilitate public involvement in the process, the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation for short) is hosting a public meeting/workshop in Burley, Idaho on April 22 (see the back cover of this Newsbrief for details).

RMP Development and Summary of Issues

The Draft EA document is an analysis of the potential environmental impacts associated with the implementation of Reclamation's Resource Management Plan currently being developed. Reclamation is preparing the Minidoka North Side RMP to ensure adequate management of resources, facilities, and access on Reclamation lands and waters in the Minidoka North Side study area. These lands include 119

scattered parcels covering approximately 17,700 acres. The RMP will serve as a blueprint for the future protection, use, management, and site development of Reclamation lands and resources in the Minidoka North Side area for the next 15 years.

The RMP addresses all activities occurring on Reclamation lands and

parcels in the Minidoka North Side study area. Reclamation identified several issues that need to be addressed by the RMP, as well as the associated EA. These issues were presented to the general public, and the list was expanded through public input, including Ad Hoc Work Group (stakeholder) concerns. A summary list of the primary issues raised follows:

- Maintain a view of the "big picture" (beyond tract-by-tract).
- Consider economic development in management decisions.
- Availability of water and water rights.
- Keep lands needed for Project purposes in Reclamation's jurisdiction.
- Define criteria for Project purposes.
- Support Irrigation District needs as a first priority.
- Dispose of lands not needed for Project purposes.
- Give preferences to adjoining owners in land sales or exchanges.
- Expand agricultural and grazing lease opportunities.
- Protect Reclamation Zone at Minidoka Dam.
- Do not relinquish Reclamation lands to BLM.
- Allow exchanges/sales to "square up" farm units.
- Inventory vegetation and wildlife resources.
- For parcels with high resource value, restrict other uses.
- Reduce impacts from ORV use, fire, weeds, dumping, encroachment, trespass, and vandalism.
- Protect wetlands and sensitive species.
- Explore opportunities for cooperative wildlife habitat/farming.
- Coordinate efforts for weed/insect control.
- Water quality management & protection.
- Provide more recreation opportunities.
- Promote economic benefits through recreation.
- Examine expanded use opportunities at the State Park.
- Protect public access to the river.
- Manage current unauthorized camping.
- Protect public safety.
- Need for boundary signage and/or fencing.
- Need to control fires—fire management.
- Conduct government-to-government consultation with affected Tribes.
- Define relationships with other agencies (e.g., U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service [FWS], Idaho Fish and Game [IDFG], Irrigation Districts, BLM, Counties).
- Comply with Federal laws related to Tribes and cultural resources.
- Need to protect historic cultural sites (e.g., Oregon Trail).
- Need to protect archeological resources.
- Keep all lands in Federal ownership for protection of Indian Trust Assets (ITAs).

Reclamation has prepared the Draft Environmental Assessment in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969. The document's primary purpose is to evaluate the potential environmental impacts associated with a proposed Federal action – in this case, implementing the RMP. In accordance with NEPA, Reclamation has examined a range of alternatives to implement the RMP: (1) the No Action Alternative (also called Alternative A); Alternative B (the Preferred Alternative), and Alternative C.

Preliminary versions of the three alternatives were presented to the public approximately one year ago at a public meeting/workshop in Burley, Idaho. Public input received at that meeting, as well as input from the Ad Hoc Work Group, helped shape the Preferred Alternative that is presented in the Draft EA.

Each of the alternatives is summarized below. Detailed, site-specific information on all of the alternatives, as well as a comparison of their features, is presented in the Draft EA.

- **Alternative A (No Action Alternative)—Continuation of Existing Management Practices.**

If implemented, this alternative would mean continuing to manage Reclamation lands according to existing agreements and under current laws and regulations. Alternative A is not a “status quo” situation. Management of the study area lands would be on an ad-hoc basis, without benefit of a comprehensive management plan. Under Alternative A, new agricultural leases would continue to be considered on a case-by-case basis, and only when contributing to the closure of drain wells. Existing grazing leases would be considered for renewal, but no new grazing leases would be considered.

- **Alternative B (Preferred Alternative)—Resource Protection/ Enhancement Emphasis.** This alternative emphasizes natural and cultural resource enhancement while maintaining current recreational opportunities. It focuses on improving implementation of Reclamation's regulations and policies as they relate to the Minidoka North Side lands. No new agricultural leases would be allowed, except for over-riding Project benefits, and only if there would be no impacts to natural or cultural resources. New grazing leases would be considered on specifically designated parcels based on natural and cultural resource values. Sand and gravel extraction would be considered on a case-by-case basis where it does not conflict with other Reclamation needs or priority natural or cultural resource values. Proactive management actions would be explored to protect state-listed and sensitive species, to improve overall habitat values, and to designate and manage public access. An Access Management Plan would be developed. No developed camping would be allowed outside of the State Park and no camping would be allowed at Bishop's Hole.

- **Alternative C—Multiple Use Emphasis.** Although similar to Alternative B, Alternative C emphasizes increased accommodation of various uses, and less on improving and restoring natural resource values. New agricultural leases would be considered on a case-by-case basis, and only if there would be no impacts to natural or cultural resources. Actions to improve habitat values would be similar to Alternative B, but more limited and restricted to development of a fire rehabilitation program. Sand and gravel extraction would be considered on a case-by-case basis. Like Alternative B, an Access Management Plan would be developed, focused on multiple uses at established sites. A key management difference between Alternatives B and C is the amount of land available for grazing. Under the Preferred Alternative, about 5,000 acres would be considered for grazing, whereas approximately 10,500 acres would be considered under Alternative C.

You can also e-mail us your request using the “Contact Us” form at the Minidoka Northside RMP website - www.usbr.gov/pn

Draft EA Request Order Form

To obtain a copy of the Draft EA
Fill out this form and mail to:

U.S Bureau of Reclamation
1150 N. Curtis Rd., Suite 100
Attn: Carolyn Coiner PN-3902
Boise, ID 83706-1234

☐ Please send me a printed copy of the Draft EA document; my address is listed to the right. **OR**

☐ Please send me a digital copy of the Draft EA document (on CD-ROM, IBM Compatible); my address is listed to the right.

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Incorporating Public Input into the Alternatives Development

As mentioned above, public comment on the preliminary alternatives helped Reclamation shape the Preferred Alternative. The initial alternatives were developed earlier in the planning process, and subsequently presented in draft form to the public at the meeting held in March 2003, which was attended by approximately 15 people. This meeting took on a “workshop” format, and Reclamation

gathered detailed input from the public on specific issues and components of the No Action Alternative, as well as the two initial action alternatives (that is, Alternatives B and C). The input has been useful in comparing the relative importance of particular issues, as well as highlighting differences among the three alternatives.

Where to Find the Draft EA Document

Copies of the Draft EA document are being sent to several places where the public can review them. Locations were chosen for their convenience and public accessibility. If you would prefer to request that a digital (CD ROM) or paper copy of the Draft EA document be mailed directly to you, use the Request Order Form on page 2 of this Newsbrief. Copies of the Draft EA are available at the following locations:

City of Burley Public Library
1300 Miller Avenue
Burley, ID

Rupert Public Library
417 7th St
Rupert, ID

U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
Snake River Area Office (East)
1359 Hansen Avenue
Burley, ID

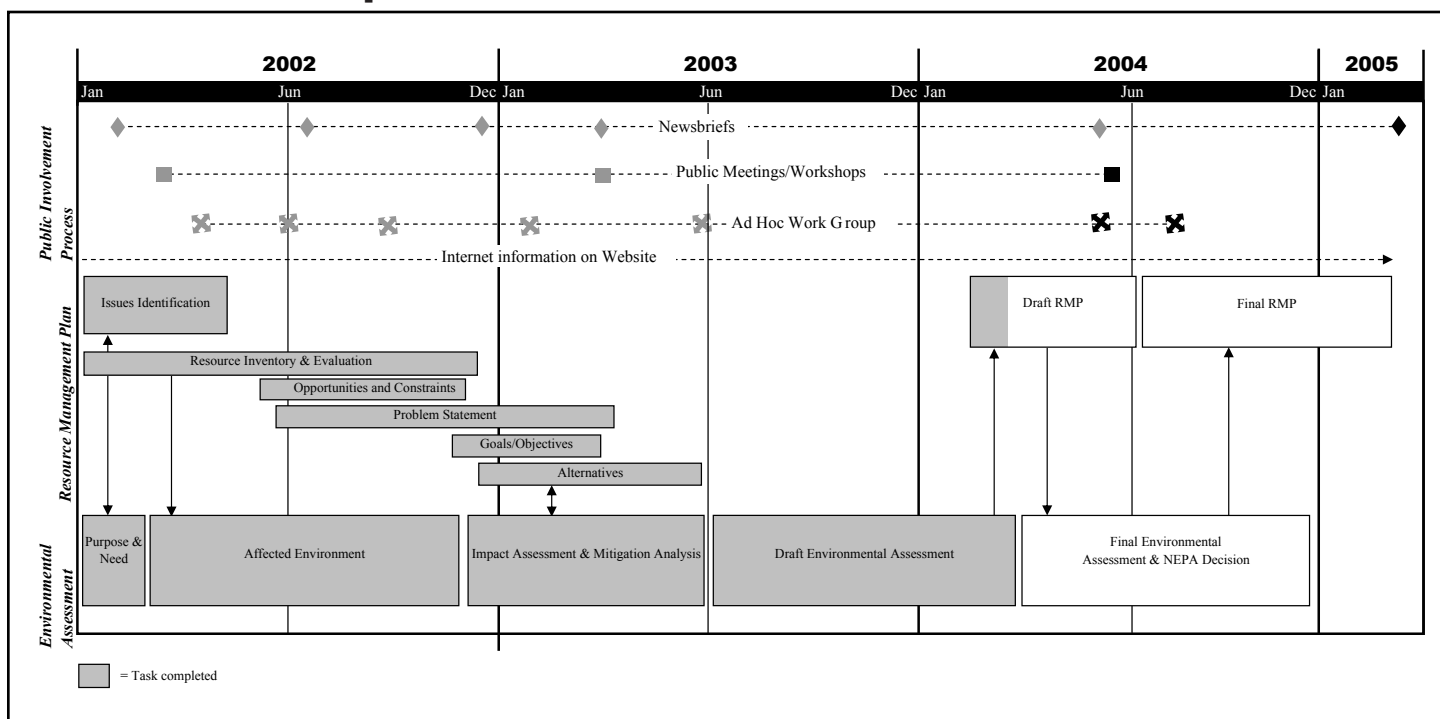
U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
PN Regional Office
1150 N. Curtis Rd. Suite 100
Boise, ID

The Draft EA document will also be available electronically (in PDF format) by April 6, 2004. Please access Reclamation’s website at www.usbr.gov/pn and follow links to the Minidoka North Side RMP to access the document electronically.

Reclamation then presented the data gathered during the public input process to the Ad Hoc Work Group in a meeting held on May 29, 2003. Using the same approach, members of the Ad Hoc Work Group discussed and assessed the key issues and components of the three alternatives. In addition to providing input on the alternatives development process, the Ad Hoc Work Group has met a total of five times so far over the course of the planning process, providing Reclamation with valuable input into all aspects of the RMP. The Ad Hoc Work Group will meet two more times – in May 2004 to review and receive comments on the Draft EA, and in July to provide input into the final plan.

Based on input from the general public, the Ad Hoc Work Group, and Reclamation’s Planning Team, Reclamation developed the Preferred Alternative, as presented in the Draft EA. Now that the Draft EA has been prepared and is ready for public review, interested stakeholders have the opportunity to comment on the draft alternatives (see the back cover).

Schedule & Workplan



Public Meeting/Workshop to Take Comments on the Draft EA

After the Draft EA is issued, Reclamation encourages you to comment on its contents, particularly the alternatives presented. Reclamation will consider public comment on this draft before choosing a plan of action, which will be incorporated into the RMP in the summer of 2004. To encourage public participation in the review of the Draft EA, Reclamation is holding a **public meeting**. The meeting will begin with an informative presentation summarizing the contents of the document. After the presentation, an informal workshop will be held to facilitate issue-specific questions about the Draft EA and to encourage one-on-one dialog. Written comments will also be accepted at this time.

The official public comment period on the Draft EA is 45 days following release of the document: April 2, 2004 – May 20, 2004. In addition to providing verbal comments at the public meeting, Reclamation invites you to submit written comments at any time during the official public comment period. All written comments should be postmarked no later than May 20, 2004. Written comments can be submitted to:

U.S Bureau of Reclamation
1150 N. Curtis Rd., Suite 100
Attn: Carolyn Coiner PN-3902
Boise, ID 83706-1234

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The location, date, and time of the public meeting are listed below.

Date: Thursday, April 22, 2004
Place: Burley Inn
800 N Overland Ave.
Burley, ID
Time: 7 p.m. to 9 p.m.

This location was selected in part because of the facility's accessibility to people with disabilities. Interested persons needing special services should contact Pam Brown, Recreation Specialist, at (208) 678-0461, extension 32 at least one week before the scheduled meeting so that arrangements can be made. TTYTDD # 1-800-833-6388.



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